

TOWN OF EGREMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD
MINUTES

Date: December 8, 2020
Time: 6:00pm
Place: Via Zoom Meeting
Egremont

Present remotely via zoom meeting were Chairman George McGurn, Vice-Chair Lucinda Fenn-Vermeulen, Board member Mary Brazie.

Others in attendance:

Poly Lanoue & Ray Palmucci: Water Department
Tom Reynolds: Buildings & Grounds Superintendent
Robin Goldberg: Assessors & Cultural Council
Juliette Haas: Board of Health Director
Fred Gordan: Housing Committee
Mary McGurn: Bylaw Review Committee
Lannon Killea
Eileen Vining
Jayne Smith: Covid Compliance Officer
Ed Regrendahl: Planning Board
Cathy Fracasse: Zoning Board of Appeals
Thomas Berkel: Finance Committee
Emily Eyre & Pat Konecky: Green Committee
Jason LaForest: Police Chief
Cara Becker: Personnel Director
Patrick Riordan
Peggy Muskrat: Library Trustees
Bruce Bernstein: Council on Aging
Rebecca Turner: Historical Commission
Marj Wexler
Will Brinker
Sue Funk: Collector/Treasurer
Bill Tynan: Conservation Commission
Chet Delaney
Jen Brown: French Park Committee

George McGurn, Chairman of the Selectboard, made an introductory statement about how the meeting will be run with each department having no more than 5 minutes.

Robin Goldberg: Board of Assessors

Members of the Board are going into the office one at a time due to COVID, working remotely and via zoom. The software conversion has taken place. COVID delayed some building permit inspections and those that have been done where external only. There have been an incredible number of deed changes with 91 sales during the past year. Prices on some of the sales have been incredibly high. A full revaluation was completed, moving forward there will be interim reval adjustments.

Robin Goldberg: Cultural Council

Twenty-three programs were funded by the Council. 16 of the applicants were able to complete their programs before COVID, with 7 having to be rolled over to the new year. Information for the current round has not been issued by the Commonwealth yet.

Mary Brazie: Assistant Town Accountant

Reporting in the absence of the Town Accountant, noted that Paul Lisi, the Accountant, worked remotely for several months due to COVID and his back surgery. He was able to keep all his work current. Free Cash was certified at about \$568,000, the highest the Town has ever seen.

Cathy Fracasse: Board of Appeals

The Board consists of all new members who have yet to meet face to face. The Board will be considering an increase in the fee for a special permit soon. Cathy plans to draft a document to make onboarding easier. The Board has been busy with applications for Retail Marijuana facilities and hopes that the Planning Board will move forward with adopting bylaws to regulate such facilities soon.

Tom Reynolds: Building and Grounds

Activities in Fiscal Year 20 included renovating the bathrooms in town hall, blacktopping a portion of the town hall parking lot, new electric panel at the shop, setting up the new Council on Aging Admin office. At French Park the electric meter was upgraded, a new horse equipment shed was purchased, and the little league fence was repaired. Activities in Fiscal Year 21 will include cleaning the town hall roof, replacing more windows in town hall, repairing the floor at the Police Station, removing trees behind town hall, beginning the electrical upgrade and installation of a new generator at Town Hall, replacing the roof on the bathrooms at French Park, putting down new sand footing in the horse riding ring at French Park, resurfacing the Basketball courts. Activities that will be budgeted for in Fiscal Year 22 will be purchasing a new tractor/mower, truck and beginning the process for a new maintenance shop near the Highway Garage. The Police Department would like a flag pole. At French Park the volley ball court and the driveway entry will be repaired. There will be slight increases in budgets for supplies, and a possible savings in the utilities. For capital items a new pick up truck and a new tractor/mower are needed. Chairman McGurn complimented Tom on his ability to take on the COVID and his innovative ideas. Member Brazie seconded this and noted that Tom saw to protecting employees at Town Hall and posted all the signage at the Park. Vice-Chairman Vermeulen noted how much she appreciated his willingness and his abilities.

Mary McGurn: Bylaw Review Committee

The Committee is reviewing the general bylaws for purpose, consistency, accuracy and verbiage. Changes may be proposed for the 2021 Annual Town Meeting.

Sue Funk: Collector/Treasurer

Reported she is preparing to send tax bills out. Is still participating in training on the new collections software. Will be leveling funding her budget.

Bill Tynan: Conservation Commission

Was happy to report that the Commission has a process in place now to act on building permits on line. The hiring of a clerk and the purchase of the video set up was delayed because of COVID.

Bruce Bernstein: Council on Aging

The Council has a full complement of active members. He noted how valuable Peg Muskrat has been as the administrative assistant. Luncheon this summer were either held outdoors and then moved to grab and go as the weather got cold. Alford and Mount Washington are becoming more active members.

During COVID food boxes were distributed to those in need, and a local restaurant donated dinners which the Fire Department delivered. The Omsbudsman are trying to continue their work though it is difficult in these times. With the closure of Southern Berkshire Elderly Transport the Town received a taxi service grant to pay for rides that has been extended to March 30. An application has been filed to continue this into the next fiscal year. The Council anticipates no budget increase and state aid should be level funded. Chairman McGurn applauded the efforts of the COA and noted that what our council has done is recognized by surrounding towns.

Bruce Bernstein: Greenways & Trail Committee

The repurposing of the old Trolley Line from Great Barrington to Egremont to provide off road walking was turned down by the Berkshire Natural Resources for funding. The whole project is on hold due to COVID.

Emergency Management:

In the absence of Ed McCormick Office Administrator Brazie read the following:
“The work of the Emergency Management Team sure took a turn of events in March that no one expected. I am proud to report that the Team discussed a pandemic periodically but never expected to be involved in one. Since March Emergency Management has been working closely with the Board of Health, Southern Berkshire Emergency Planning Committee, Mass Department of Public Health, and Mass. Emergency Management Agency to monitor any COVID virus in the community and to keep the community knowledgeable of preventive measures.
We were successful in obtaining Personal Protective Equipment for all our first responders to keep them protected from the virus. In addition we were able to obtain protective masks and distributed to any community member who required them.
Emergency Management was able to be frugal in its spending so that it is not expected to seek any additional funding other than the amount that is appropriated each year.
We would like to thank all the Town employees, Boards and our Partners for their help and cooperation.”

Thomas Berkel: Finance Committee

Tom said that folks should read the FY 21 report by Finance as a primer on where funds come from and where they go in proportion to each other: to understand sources and uses and financial nomenclature. Over the past fiscal period Finance as a committee has worked to think from a more strategic posture. Finance strongly recommends the establishment of a codified routine capital planning model with the aim of establishing CAPEX line items annually in a coordinated sequence thus foretelling financial commitments as much as practicable. As each department prepares its budget for FY22, the more commentary provided the better, saving time and running around. I urged information to smooth the process. Chairman McGurn underlined the role that the Finance Committee plays in the budget process and getting up front info on entrepreneurial activities and grants. Tom also said that a department had extraordinary expenses over the last year they should plan for a 50-75% increase. Selectboard Member Brazie noted that most COVID expenses were being reimbursed but that funding ends on December 31, 2020 unless renewed by the Federal Government.

Fire Department:

In the absence of the Fire Chief Office Administrator Brazie read the following:
“Just wanted to let u know I will not be able to attend zoom meeting tonight our gear and equipment salesman is coming up from New Jersey with our new turn out gear. And I have inspections that I need to do. Our budget request should be staying the same this year and are looking to replace our big 1995 4wd pumper with a Mini 4wd pumper which early figures are around \$300,000. And will better serve our

needs and be around \$150,000 to \$200,000 cheaper than a full size truck. If anyone wants to talk further or has questions please reach out.”

Jennifer Brown: French Park Committee

The Committee has not yet spent its FY 21 budget as trail development and maintenance has been delayed by COVID. This work will take place in the spring of 2021. New brochures are needed as the trails are getting a lot of use these days. The Committee may ask for an increased budget as it plans to add a new connector trail along the wood line below the dog park and the new Pollinator Garden. The donor who had given funds for trail upkeep has put any further donations on hold. The Pickel Ball Court is also on hold.

Emily Eyre: Green Committee

The Green Committee has two large projects beginning: A rain barrel sales program to reduce the use of groundwater and control run off; Municipal Vulnerability Program which is a 2 grant program to prepare for crises due to climate change. The Committee continues to submit articles to Edge and post information on line. The ERecycles event was cancelled due to COVID. Several residents have taken on roadside clean up as a regular practice. A reuse initiative that is a virtual tool sharing library was launched after COVID. There is also a reduce and reuse directory that encourages the use of what is available instead of buying new. A new program to collect used pill bottles, both prescription and over the counter, was established with a collection box at Town Hall. The Committee is working to apply for a Keep Massachusetts Beautiful Pollinator Grant to help the Agriculture Commission. The Committee has no budget. Emily issued a thank you for Marj Wexler for her many years of work for the Green Committee.

Juliette Haas: Board of Health

The Board is responsible for regulating wells and septic, responding to housing issues, and for responding to infectious diseases. The Pandemic has taken up much time over the past several months. With help from the Berkshire Health Alliance the number of cases, fortunately low in Egremont, have been monitored. A grant was received from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to help with COVID expenses so the Board's budget has not been expended. During this normal work had to go on and the increase in Title 5 inspections due to home sales is unbelievable. The Board's revenue has already increased to \$19,000 compared to last years \$15,000. Selectboard Chairman McGurn noted the demands on the Board of Health have been biblical due to the pandemic. He said that the Board of Health's addressing of the issues has been extraordinary and that the reaching out and forming alliances was appreciated.

Jayne Smith: Covid Compliance Officer

Jayne noted that she is a resource for the town as COVID demands can be overwhelming. She said Egremont runs well and is a joy to work with. Selectboard Chairman George McGurn added that because of COVID Town Government was given authority to deal with aspects of remote learning that it normally would not have, such as setting up remote learning environments at April Hill, many town officials have been involved such as Police, Fire, Building Inspector, and Board of Health.

Jim Noe: Road Superintendent

Jim reported that they are prepared for winter. Work was delayed during COVID but he was able to get Creamery Road resurfaced and to do crack sealing on some roads. COVID also disrupted delivery of supplies and parts so that delayed work even more. The Department was also short an employee for a while. Storm clean-up this past year has been higher than in the past because there have been a lot of high wind events. In the coming year more work will need to be done on Mount Washington Road while we await funding through the Transportation Improvement Program. There will be a slight increase in all budget areas due to cost increases. For capital expenses a new pick-up truck

and dump truck are needed. Selectboard Chairman McGurn asked that he update the priority road repair list.

Rebecca Turner: Historical Commission

The Commission continues to conduct oral histories. The Commission worked with the Route 23/41 reconstruction engineers to make the MassDOT changes as aesthetically fitting to the historic character of the town as possible. The update of the MACRS is ongoing. The Commission is reviewing the organization of the Archives. COVID has delayed this work as the Commission cannot gather together. A demolition delay bylaw for Historic Homes is being drafted. The Commission is thankful new member Douglas Cooper. The Commission will continue with its outreach and plans to ask for a level funded budget. Selectboard Chairman McGurn said that the Board has been following the correspondence between the Commission and MassDOT. Though they have sometime had to say no to requests, they are listening and trying to work with the town.

Fred Gordan: Housing Committee

With the announcement that the homes from Great Barrington were no longer available to the Town, the Committee went to work to come up with a plan for affordable housing on the town's site by Town Hall. The current median sales price of a home in Egremont is \$690,000. A housing trust is being formed to help finance the project. A recent grant application to help with master planning was not successful. The Committee is holding conversations with Construct, Community Development Corporation and Habitat for Humanity. It is hoped to have a spade in the ground by June 30.

George McGurn: Human Resources

The HR Department does not have a budget.

Peggy Muskrat: Library

Libraries have always been important, but are more important now in the pandemic. During the pandemic all books could still be accessed. The Library is now open. The Library also offers free wifi. She was happy to note that several children use the Library regularly. Selectperson Brazie noted that the repairs to the Building spelled out a needs study several years ago are vital to get done.

Cara Becker: Personnel Director

Cara's focus, as she is new, has been to meet and great staff. The performance evaluation process for paid employees has begun.

Ed Regendahl: Planning Board

Ed reported that Jared Kelly is Chair, Ed is Vice-Chair, Nick Keene is the rep to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and Donna Bersch-Gordan is the Secretary/Treasurer. The Board is working on a retail marijuana bylaw that is almost done. The Board plans to survey residents for details as to what they want to see in this bylaw. The bylaw could be proposed to the voters before May. The Planning Board has been approached by the Historical Commission regarding the demolition delay bylaw. There will be no budget increase. Ed ended with a tribute to Helen Krancer for her years of exceptional work on the Planning Board.

Jason LaForest: Police Department

The Department has 5500 calls for service over the last year, many of them speeding complaints. The Department tries to cover all town roads including all the secondary roads. The 4th Full-time Officer approved at the last town meeting is in place. The IMC conversation is ongoing. Department policies have been amended to line up with accreditation standards though the department is not accredited. Stats are now being reported to the FBI, this will help with grant applications. A new cruiser is needed as the

2016 one has 127,000 miles on it and has needed frequent repairs. Overall the budget is good. There are no other personnel changes needed. The Police Reform Bill, which does seem to be stagnant at this time, will change how police are credentialed. There may be costs to this and additional training may be required. The bill will take away police protections and immunities leaving police officer personally vulnerable. Selectboard Chairman McGurn that the police reform bill is moving slowly and raised some very important issues. He expressed everyone's pride in our department and force. Jason said he is looking at ways to improve customer service and communications.

Mary Brazie: Selectboard

The Board's budget should decrease for the coming year. It was noted that the Town's annual report has been published and was very well done.

Juliette Haas: Town Clerk

2020 was the mother of all election years. Juliette thanked her election team. She plans to have some town records bound. Her office received a \$5,000 grant to help with costs of the mail in ballot process for the elections. Expenses should be underspent as there have been no travel or conference costs. In the coming year there is only the town election to contend with.

Mary Brazie: Office Administrator

Mary thanked all town officials for their patience and understanding during the pandemic as town hall has been closed to all but essential staff. She noted that Egremont's governance continued with its usual exemplary service throughout the pandemic.

Will Brinker: Water Department

Due to technologies issues experienced by Poly Lanoue, Chair of the Water Department, Will reported that the infrastructure replacement grant through USDA is moving forward, the department has been working with MassDOT in pinpointing the location of the water lines and water service hook ups along Rte 23/41, mapping of the system continues, the department is billing for more water as leak detection continues. The coming year will see the need for some water plant maintenance and possible water line replacement/upgrades. There are currently no surprises in the budget. The Department is working on a long range plan. Selectboard Chairman McGurn asked about Nate Stalker's licenses which are now current as primary operator.

Meeting adjourned at 8:22pm.

Mary Brazie,
Office Administrator

minutes.21/dec8allboards